CASUALTIES

"Human beings, like plans, prove fallible in the presence of those ingredients that are missing in maneuvers -- danger, death and live ammunition."

Barbara Tuchman

Men tend to slow down and stop fighting when others get wounded or killed. There is surely nothing new in this fact. I found that leaders at all levels tend to curb some of their aggressive spirit after being wounded, some to the point of becoming cautious and later even ineffective. Good leadership and an effective chain of command can help to overcome this problem.

In Vietnam the availability of helicopters for medical evacuation could halt a fight in a second, especially with an inexperienced commander. It is essential to have good medics on the ground with enough judgment to know who needs immediate evacuation and who does not. One of my best units used the First Sergeant to handle personnel and vehicular casualties at the scene of the fight. In this unit, rarely did a man get air evacuated unless he was seriously wounded.

Men killed in action can cause a morale problem unless their bodies are quickly removed from sight. Nothing so adversely affects fighting troops' morale as the sight of poncho-clad bodies laid out in rows. It affects my morale. When a unit experiences men killed, the best tonic is immediate success in killing the enemy -- they must even the score plus some, as soon as possible.

I was able to use a rule of two wounds; a man could then (if he wanted to) move to an easier job. This worked okay in Vietnam, but might not be applicable in heavier combat.

The chaplain kept me informed of wounded personnel and of plans for memorial services. I always had the chaplain and surgeon with me during my hospital visits. A commander's visit, with words of a job well done, help the morale of a wounded soldier.

"The morale of the soldier is the greatest single factor in war and the best way to achieve high morale in wartime is by success in battle."

Montgomery of El Alamein

7